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21 March 1963

Briefing for
House Armed Services Committee

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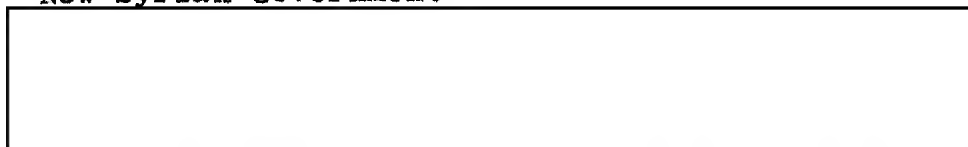
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IRAQ

- I. The coup on 8 February which ousted the psychotic Qasim brought in a young and untried regime which is faced with the task of bringing order out of the economic and political chaos left by four and a half years of Qasim.
 - A. Iraq's new rulers are a combination of Iraqi nationalists and pan-Arab socialistic Baathists. The Baathists dominate the government but depend on the army, which has many anti-Baathist officers who resent the Baath's leadership. Dissension is likely to break out soon.
 - B. One of the toughest problems faced by the new regime is its relations with Iraq's 800,000 Kurds, about 15-20 per cent of the population. They successfully rebelled against Qasim and held off the Iraqi army over 20 months. The present regime is attempting to reach an understanding with them whereby the Kurds will be allowed some sort of local autonomy. So far negotiations have not progressed very well and the war could break out again.
 - C. The Baathists are strongly anti-Communists and have crushed the Iraqi Communists, jailed

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hundreds of party members, and executed several of the party's central committee. Relations with Moscow, excellent under Qasim, are now bad. Relations with the US are good--five members of the cabinet are products of US universities--and the Iraqis have asked to buy US helicopters and tanks, items previously purchased from the USSR. There are indications that the regime wishes to loosen Iraq's ties with the Soviet Bloc and gradually replace Communist technicians with Western experts. However, the regime fears to give the impression of having too close ties with the West and outwardly professes a neutral foreign policy.

Another unresolved problem is Iraq's relations with the Iraq Petroleum company (23.75 per cent owned by Standard of New Jersey & Socony). Qasim seized over 99 per cent of the company's concessionary area and imposed a high loading fee on oil going out of Basra. As a consequence the company did not increase its production. Since the country depends on oil income (about \$266 million a year), and governmental

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and development costs are rising, settlement of the dispute is important to the new regime.

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SYRIA

- I. Syria's Baathist-inspired coup on 8 March came exactly one month after the Iraqi one. The new Syria regime is even more heavily dominated by the Baath than that in Iraq, but is much more shaky. Pro-Nasirism is stronger in Syria and the country is deeply divided into a number of factions. The army, which is the key to the situation, has a considerable pro-Nasir element. Its leadership at the present time, however, is pan-Arab in its inclinations, but desires to retain Syria's national identity.
- II. Syria traditionally has been a pawn between Egypt and Iraq. The present Syrian regime will retain control or be overthrown on the issue of its relations with Nasir's Egypt. Syria has been very unstable since 1949 and has undergone eight military coups since then. The army has continually interfered in the civilian government.

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LAOS

- I. Present tension in Laos does not arise so much from friction between right and left wing factions as from the efforts of the Pathet Lao to consolidate their position in the countryside at the expense of the neutralist forces.
- II. The Pathet Lao are using a mixture of terror and subversion against neutralist garrisons throughout the country, but the focal point of their campaign is the strategic Plaine des Jarres where neutralist commander Kong Le has his headquarters.
 - A. The Pathet Lao have made determined efforts to undermine the morale and the ability to resist of the neutralist forces.
 1. Two neutralist officers have been assassinated in recent weeks; others have been threatened.
 2. The Pathet Lao have virtually blockaded overland supply lines to the Plaine des Jarres, intercepting all but a trickle of goods earmarked by the Soviets for the neutralists via North Vietnam.
 3. Pathet Lao subversion led to the defection early this month of elements of a

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Kong Le battalion located at Xieng Khouang town on the eastern fringe of the Plaine; while most of the troops have returned, perhaps as many as 100 remain in the hills with the Pathet Lao.

III. Kong Le, who only a few months ago was mouthing the Communist line, is reacting vigorously to these pressures.

1. He has embarked on a purge of pro-Communist officers in his ranks, arresting some, exiling others, and possibly even liquidating a few.
2. He has arranged for airlifts from Vientiane--

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to lessen dependence on land resupply.

3. He has taken additional steps to consolidate his defensive posture on the Plaine des Jarres, including the construction of a "fallback" airstrip to be used in case the Plaine des Jarres airfield is overrun.
4. Kong Le also has made contingency arrangements with right wing military elements--primarily Meo guerrilla units--for joint action should the Pathet Lao resort to major

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military action.

IV. The trend in Laos toward polarization about the two extreme factions threatens the concept of a tripartite coalition government, and unless this trend is checked could eventually lead to a resumption of civil war.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

- I. While South Vietnam's counterinsurgency efforts continue to show gradual improvement, the Viet Cong--now estimated at 23-25,000--are also taking steps to increase their own effectiveness.
 - A. They have reorganized their command structure to effect greater coordination and are building toward regimental formations.
 1. Captured documents, prisoners and defectors reveal that two skeletal regiments are being formed to the north of Saigon; in northern South Vietnam, three others have been identified and a fourth is reported in the planning stage.
 2. These regimental echelons are functioning now primarily as staff headquarters capable of coordinating battalion operations, but evidence points to Viet Cong intention to develop combat regiments.
 3. There is no evidence as yet that the Viet Cong possess artillery.
 4. However, in recent months, increased quantities of Bloc-manufactured materiel--notably Chinese Communist recoilless rifles,

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ammunition and medicines--have been captured by South Vietnamese forces.

II. The build-up of Viet Cong forces, while drawing largely on local manpower resources, is heavily dependent for its effectiveness on the infiltration of cadres and specialists from North Vietnam.

A. According to infiltrators who have been captured or defected, North Vietnam has set up a permanent training school for infiltrators just outside Hanoi.

1. Available evidence indicates that at least 4,000 men were infiltrated into South Vietnam in 1962.

B. While hard evidence on the current rate of information is still lacking, [] estimates that the Communists have the capability to infiltrate about 500 men per month on the complex of trails along the South Vietnam-Laos border.

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III. Government troops (215,000 regulars, 75,000 Civil Guard, 100,000 Self-Defense Corps) have stepped up pressure on the Viet Cong.

A. Strikes into traditional Viet Cong base areas are aggravating guerrilla supply problems.

B. Faster reaction to reported Communist troop concentrations is probably a factor in the

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decline of Viet Cong attacks this winter--
averaging about 50 per week or half the 1962
average.

1. The Communists lately have also been empha-
sizing company size rather than battalion
size attacks.

C. There are signs that the strategic hamlets
and other programs are taking hold in some
areas, resulting in increased intelligence
support from the peasantry and a rise in Viet
Cong defections.

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